

# Instant Man?—Ardrey

*In today's contribution to Picture Magazine's series of articles by noted authors, Robert Ardrey, who wrote "The Territorial Imperative" and "Social Contract," surveys the current scientific controversy over whether, now or in the future, it will be possible to alter the human personality for the better.*

By Robert Ardrey

AS A DRAMATIST in my younger Broadway years, I regarded drama critics with the kind of dubious affection that chickens lavish on weasels. Now that I have become an observer, interpreter and occasional critic of the sciences, I can with compassion comprehend the scientist who mutters, "Get that weasel out of my chickenyard." Yet someone must warn concerned citizens that just as famous playwrights can produce bad plays, famous scientists can produce bad science.

There is nothing new about offering mankind lethal Utopias with what passes for scientific authority. When Karl Marx offered his, he called it "scientific socialism." History has had time to evaluate Marx's scientific approach to the classless society and the withering of states — and to evaluate what happens when the human being surrenders his destiny to other men's devices. But history has not had time to judge contemporary scientific proposals for Utopia resting on the manipulation of man himself less than on the manipulation of society.

"Instant Man" is based on the assumption that scientific techniques have advanced so far that we can produce new and better men as we do better mousetraps. It derives from the organizing fallacy in many a scientist's dream for future human concord.

Having failed spectacularly to invent better worlds, we presume to invent appropriate men to live in them. But there is a difficulty. So rapid and complex have been the advancements — particularly in biology — that the citizens can rarely know what the scientist is talking about, presuming that the scientist knows himself.

## ***We can rarely know what the scientist is saying***

Last year, according to the authoritative journal *Science*, a mild shock wave spread through the 11,000 members of the American Psychological Association at the group's annual meeting, when the members received the proposal "that mind-affecting drugs be used on political leaders to prevent them from exercising their baser impulses." What might shock the layman less than mildly is that the proposal was made by Dr. Kenneth Clark, the association's president.

Such naivete on the part of a presumably responsible scientist could only have been counseled by despair. And Dr. Clark's despair is shared by many others. When will a significant



Robert Ardrey

# Finds Some Fallacies

number of us, drowning in a rising sea of social insolubles, likewise clutch at such suicidal scientific straws?

We are vulnerable. We may spot the impracticality of medicating men more powerful than ourselves, but how shall we identify the more complex, more persuasive prescriptions that come our way?

What we must recognize is that we have no true, driving, unrejectable religion other than science itself. The gods upon whom we leaned for so long have diminished or withdrawn; if they speak to us at all they speak from beyond far ambiguous hills.

So a new temple has risen at every crossroads, every main-square the world around, without deference to religion or race, politics or ideology. That temple is science. We bow, we listen to the verdicts of the priests. If there exists a brotherhood of man in the twentieth century, then it responds to a single unquestioning faith: "Science says."

The citizen must inspect the goods of the temple with care. And the scientist must, like Martin Luther, be willing to tack his public disavowals on the door of a church in Wittenberg — and accept the consequences.

## How many have spoken frankly about Skinner?

Yet, how many scientists have spoken frankly about B. F. Skinner's recent "Beyond Freedom and Dignity"? This book is most persuasive on the subject of Instant Man if the reader knows little about behaviorist psychology.

Professor Skinner assumes that we are all born ciphers, without individual inborn propensities or significant genetic differences, and that our adult personalities will be determined entirely through learning, whether from family, education or social environment. Any faults or virtues must be attributed to learning — and that learning, according to Professor Skinner, comes by what is technically known as "operant conditioning," less technically, as "reinforcement theory." Desirable traits are reinforced through pleasurable consequences, undesirable ones discouraged through punishment. Thus, a child learns to speak language solely to gain his parents' approval and avoid disapproval. This should be news to parents.

Professor Skinner's Utopia, as lethal as all the others, rests on the proposition that competition and aggressiveness, violence, selfishness, greed, malice, injustice and resentment will vanish from the human horizon through skillful management of the "operant conditioning" without which they could not exist.

This and other conclusions of behaviorist psychology are based on experiments with unnatural animals — domesticated rats, mice, pigeons — inbred for so many generations that they have become virtually identical creatures

that respond predictably to pellets of food or electric shocks offered by the manipulators of their behavior.

It is our very diversity, ignored by Skinner, that makes impossible methods of management successfully applied to inbred rats. Also ignored through continual reference to his techniques as "scientifically demonstrated" are doubts widely held by other scientists. Yet where are the men of science who should be revealing to the layman that what is being sold as science is simply Skinnerism?

Better science is eugenics. The late H. J. Muller, as great a geneticist as America ever produced, was the principal advocate of selective breeding — such as is done with dogs and sheep and cattle — as a means of possibly producing a new, domesticated kind of man.

The elimination of aggressiveness, Muller's principal target, remains theoretically possible. In early efforts to domesticate wild cattle, the most unruly were undoubtedly killed until through sufficient generations the cow came into being. In comparable generations of unremitting authority and rigorous elimination of undesirables from the human breeding stock, a non-aggressive beast might be produced who would follow without protest the deep-throated cowbell. Whether he should still be called "man" is a question.

Eugenics has never appealed much to the public mind, perhaps, because like Kenneth Clark's medicated Utopia, it is too easily understood. So the newest of scientific enthusiasms known as "genetical reconstruction" might have a chance, since no one understands it.

## Repair therapy seen as "billiard-ball genetics"

Every since the discovery of the chemical coding of the (DNA molecule), some biologists have been carried away by the vision of reconstructing the human gene according to social values. Like behaviorism's operant conditioning, the best thing that can be said about genetical reconstruction is that it will not work.

Undoubtedly it will be possible within a generation to repair through biochemical means not a few single-gene deficiencies such as hemophilia. Such therapy falls within the field that Huxley called "billiard-ball genetics," with one gene producing one consequence. Half a century ago, following the "resurrection" of Gregor Mendel and the discovery of the gene as the carrier of inheritance, billiard-ball genetics dominated scientific understanding. But, in the exploding world of biology, that was a long time ago.

Advances of recent decades have demonstrated that in the nucleus of a single human reproductive cell are anywhere from 20,000 to 100,000 genes — precisely how many is anybody's guess.

To make things more complicated, most human attributes — including those of most

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# 'I Renounce the Instant Utopias'

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pressing social concern, such as intelligence and aggressiveness — are influenced by a group of genes acting in concert or by a single gene acting as a member of various teams to produce a variety of consequences. To change one is to enter a genetical labyrinth of unpredictable side effects. Fiddling around with genetical systems is chancier and more irreversible than fiddling with political systems where one can at least have counterrevolutions.

## **All of the approaches demand an "authority"**

The "scientific" approaches to Instant Man — whether propagandized, medicated, conditioned, domesticated or de-genetized — unite in their demand for authority.

Someone must decide what constitutes a better man. Someone must forbid protest. Someone must run the shop while man is reconstructed. Ego and innocence may combine to assure a B. F. Skinner or a Kenneth Clark that he will be the one to conduct the operant conditioning or to administer the medication — although history suggests other bossmen.

The perturbed layman can find his own reassurance: These lethal shortcuts to Utopia will not work. Even eugenics' selective breeding,

scientifically described as possible, requires too many generations of consent on the part of rebellious man to become a political possibility.

Instant Man exists only in the minds of the deluded.

## **Through ingenuity, man can face new trials**

Man is 3 billion years old — as old as life itself. Our earliest known ancestors — microscopic spores, incipient algae — lie fossilized in the unyielding rocks of the Swaziland Formation in southern Africa. Life is two-thirds as old as our planet, perhaps even older.

Throughout a range of time unimaginable, death and life have sorted through the species, selecting here and discarding there. Had a single generation in our ancestral line flunked the course, none of us would be here. Then, out of trials virtually yesterday and by testing normal random mutation, we discovered that within the environment of our time that standing erect, eating meat, increasing brain activity all had survival advantage. We became man, all of us invested with the built-in tendencies of body and behavior that served us so well through 3 billion evolving years.

Man is a success story—but so is the deer-mouse, the baboon, the elephant. All have sur-

vived trials afflicting us from our most remote beginnings.

It is undeniable that men face new trials, mostly of our own making. It is likewise undeniable that with our human quality of foresight we may give way to despair. But a being who has had the ingenuity to adapt his ways to Arctic demands, to the thin air of the high al-tiplano, to the sparse desert, to the overwhelming tropics, can through ingenuity find adaptive solutions to present predicaments. To believe otherwise is to deny man himself and to ask for extinction.

I renounce the instant Utopias. Whatever his avarice, self-seeking ambitions, competitiveness and presently perceived impossible contradictions, man's strength remains the strength that has seen him through billions of evolutionary years. Man's search for better worlds, which laymen and scientists alike need and demand, cannot without cosmic silliness be founded on man-made men.

Our belief in ourselves as highly evolved animals, with an ancient legitimate past and a credible legitimate future, could some day become the religion we all need. And the graves unmarked by any but temporary tears of the faithless will provide brief comment on our advocates of Instant — and impossible — Man.

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